DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 523 EC 071 311

AUTHOR White, Ann H.
TITLE NCEMMH Report on Needs in Special Education.
INSTITUTION National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped, Columbus, Ohio.
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Needs; Evaluation; Exceptional Child Education; *Handicapped Children; Information Services; Inservice Teacher Education; Instructional Materials; Intervention; *Literature Reviews; Regular Class Placement
IDENTIFIERS *National Center on Educational Media Materials; NCEMMH

ABSTRACT

Presented is a literature review on national special education needs in the following areas: information; mainstreaming; evaluation of student progress; a systems approach; early identification and intervention; legislation; and the training of teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents to work with handicapped children. It is explained that the NCEMMH can help educators to plan, organize, and implement improved instruction of handicapped students by developing systems for identifying and reporting special education needs, for evolving and field-testing instructional materials, and for facilitating communication between teachers, school districts, state-regional resource and materials centers, state departments of special education, and the NCEMMH. (LH)

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NCEMMH REPORT ON NEEDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Ann H. White, Ph. D.

Introduction

The scarcity of needs assessment studies within the field of special education has made it very difficult to plan systematically and rationally for the solution of educational problems. In some areas of special education, considerable theoretical and descriptive data exist, but little of this information can be used to make instructional decisions. Although many current programs have proved enriching and beneficial to handicapped learners, the data which substantiated these particular developments are still not suitable for analysis and prioritization of programs on a national level. The few well-designed, empirical studies that do exist have been aimed at proving the worth of a particular strategy, in a local context, at a certain time. Little attention has been given to potential cost-benefit applications on a broad scale or to long-range implications of particular program priorities.

This type of information can be compiled only by a comprehensive national assessment of needs, which would provide valid descriptions of learning resources presently available to handicapped learners and would focus on identifying the discrepancies between those resources and what should and could be made available. This type of data is in short supply, if it exists at all. In reviewing the "Dimensions of Need for Educational Programs for Exceptional Children," Rossmiller (1969) states:

> Research and evaluation of instructional programs for exceptional children is conspicuous by its absence. The literature is replete with exhortations concerning what "ought" to be and void of evidence concerning the efficacy of the programs which are advocated. Cost-benefit analysis of such programs is nonexistent.... There is great need for research and development work which will lead to more effective programs for education of exceptional children (p. 92).

Coffing (1973), who has developed "A Needs Analysis Methodology for Education of the Handicapped," has commented on both the lack of available information upon which to base rational planning and the lack of methods for obtaining the information:

> In the field of education of the handicapped, as in other fields, there is an absence of standardized, systematic, operational rules and procedures for defining and measuring needs. In reviewing the literature and in examining what practitioners in

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> the field actually do, one finds methods, techniques, or approaches that are used some of the time to assess some kinds of needs. But one does not find one or more methodologies capable of providing information to decision-makers with respect to anywhere near the full range of their actual concerns (p. 6).

Summary of Studies

IMC/RMC Network. The following is a summary of studies that were performed within the context of the Special Education Instructional Materials Centers/Regional Media Centers for the Deaf Network and that appear to have implications for broad scale planning.

A few studies have dealt with different components of the SEIMC/RMC Network. Edge (1973) conducted a needs assessment of Ohio's Instructional Resource Centers (IRCs) by surveying the opinions of Ohio's IRC coordinators and directors. The results indicated that the greatest needs fell in the category of developing inservice training programs and in improving communications.

Lilly and Kelleher (1971) conducted a regional study of teachers' perceived needs in instruction in the NWSEIMC region. The survey investigated teachers' needs in instructional and related professional activities and teachers' familiarity with 14 sets of instructional materials. The findings indicated that, in general, teachers perceived their major problems to be related to direct instruction of students in the classroom.

Smith and MacMahon (1972) studied the impact of associate SEIMCs in selected areas of Wisconsin with respect to teacher familiarity with materials, use of knowledge about SEIMCs, and services perceived as appropriate for associate SEIMCs to conduct. The findings indicated that the associate SEIMCs served all teachers in the area equally, despite the differences in distance. Additional analysis by Smith and MacMahon (1972) showed that teachers in regions with associate SEIMCs were more familiar with materials than were teachers in regions without associate SEIMCs. Also, a significant difference was found in the teachers' knowledge of materials depending upon access to an SEIMC.

One of the most extensive studies on the SEIMC/RMC Network was conducted by Williams and Johnson (1968). This study concentrated on two major areas.

1. The investigators were interested in the extent of the services provided to users in the field and how many potential users were actually utilizing these services.

2. The investigators were interested in what the users considered their most important problem within each region.

The data indicated that within their regions, the SEIMCs successfully informed teachers of the availability and accessibility of materials. Data further indicated that the teachers' most pressing problems were in the areas of classroom instruction. This study also indicated that teachers needed direct assistance in the classroom to change the children's academic behavior.

Information Needs. White (1973) conducted an assessment of information needs in the field of special education, as perceived by the state directors. While state directors of special education required many kinds of information, the kinds of information regarded as most essential dealt with field-test and evaluation data about products; information about the level of the child, and specific exceptionalities for which the product is effective; research and development data; data that compared one product with other products; and descriptions of the equipment and physical packaging. Of the 48 state directors contacted by White, only five were aware of any formal procedures to disseminate products teachers had developed. An unquestionable need exists for a centralized agency to help in this task.

If needs represent the discrepancy between "reality" and "desirability," the long-range goals for special education should reflect attention to needs. These goals are: the implementation of mandatory legislation; the upgrading of personnel information; design and implementation of programs for specific exceptionalities; provision of full services for teachers and children; assistance in program planning and evaluation; utilization of management systems; and development of relationships between state directors and hospitals or other institutions not under the aegis of the state director. In helping the states fulfill their long-range plans, information is needed regarding materials and their delivery, IMCs and learning centers, the training of personnel, programs and curricula, specific exceptionalities, cost effectiveness, adaptation and use of media and materials, technical assistance, planning, and the process of changing program funding from federal monies to other sources.

Descriptions of materials information systems, especially those for the field, suggest further needs of special education. The Select-Ed Prescriptive Materials Retrieval System (PMRS) makes it possible for an educator to select materials that correspond directly to a child's learning deficit, thus providing prescriptive remediation. It is set up along 13 basic skill areas and 8 educational descriptor term areas so that materials can be selected on the basis of physical makeup, grade or chronological level, reading level, and mental age suitability. The educator can present the materials in such a manner as to elicit the desired student response.

As of January, 1973, the Computer Based Resource Unit (CBRU) system included 38 units containing numerous suggestions about how instructional planning can be done. The information is computerized and coded to learning variables so that it can be sorted to provide unique programs for individual children.

The University of Texas SEIMC information retrieval program is structured so that the materials are selected on the basis of specific information provided about the student. There are many other special education information systems; however, most of them do not search for materials on the basis of specific child needs, but rather focus on major areas such as mental retardation, deafness, blindness, and so forth.

Mainstreaming. The entire concept of special classes has been challenged. Nelson and Schmidt (1971) noted, "Statements about the efficacy of special classes presuppose a number of prior statements such as efficacy for whom, efficacy under what circumstances, efficacy at what time, and efficacy for what goal" (pp. 382-383). Before a blanket statement can be made as to the "goodness" or "badness" of special classes, it becomes evident that studies must be done about individual children and how special classes affect children with different handicaps, different personalities, and different learning characteristics. Bruinicks and Rynders (1972) state, "One need that becomes painfully evident from a review of past research efforts is that researchers have chosen to ignore the possibility that existing administrative arrangements in special education may affect individual children in different ways" (p. 42). Therefore, different assumptions about the value of special classes, homogeneous grouping, unique curricula, and specially trained teachers must be studied before any conclusions can be reached.

Goldstein (1972) believes that there is no reliable way to predict which handicapped or retarded children will be assimilated into society on society's terms. He says, "In a sense, by placing an educable mentally retarded child in a special class we are saying that the probability of his becoming socially assimilated at maturity is small unless some kind of early intervention is applied" (p. 95). The assumption is made, then, that in the case of educational intervention, the child's experiences in the classroom will lead to "a level and kind of critical and independent action that will be consonant with the demands of his environment at maturity" (p. 95). Goldstein's final appraisal, then, is that there are no conclusive data that state why some children succeed and why some fail. It is necessary that the behaviors enhancing the chances for success be delineated and then incorporated into the curriculum. He says that the curriculum must be built around those skills that will be problem-solving skills in socio-occupational events. Mastery of language and mastery of the process of computation are the chief problem-solving tools in socio-occupational events (p. 99). This social learning curriculum, which Goldstein describes, assumes that each environment has three normative aspects: physical, social, and psychological--all three interdependent and interrelated. It is only when these three need areas are treated in a curriculum that a child can mature to successfully participate in socio-occupational events.

Heiss and Mischiu (1972) state that the three directions of the efforts to design curricula for the retarded have been unit approaches,

task analysis approaches, and social learning approaches. Heiss and Mischiu state that before we can begin to decide which methods or curricula are best for retarded children, we must ask the question, "How does the EMR child learn what?" (p. 118). One important consideration in the design and the development of a curriculum for any group, and especially for the mentally retarded, is the linguistic competence of the target sample. Studies show that success in occupations has a correlation with ability to communicate acceptably (p. 134).

Systems Approach. Lazar (1972) states that one basic assumption underlying the development and use of fractional practices is that human behavior "may be successfully separated into specific entities which are independent and capable of being individually identified and evaluated" (p. 138). He believes that it would be better to use the overall systems approach in developing materials or curricula for children. If a systems approach were used, the teacher would become an important variable and, according to Lazar, the "locus of control for the learning situation" (p. 138). Consequently, there is a need for research on the role and influence of the special class teacher variable.

Evaluation of Student Progress. Whelan (1972) believes that the idea of a 70 percent pass, 69 percent fail system of evaluation is inadequate in meeting the needs of the special child. He believes that with proper evaluation, 95 percent of the children can achieve 100 percent mastery in performance. He admits that this would require much planning and careful evaluation and monitoring, but that it would be worthwhile. Evelyn Deno (1972) states, "To assume the mantle of teacher implies the belief that a child can achieve something better with pedagogic intervention than he can without it" (p. 372). What the teacher decides the child should know can limit what the child learns. "A first order problem in setting maximum realization of potential as an educational goal is that we don't know what the limits of human potential may be" (p. 372). Therefore, self-actualization cannot be taken seriously until means are developed to determine maximum potential.

Dunn (1968) challenged the use of intelligence tests, labels such as "mentally retarded," and separate and different educational experiences for mildly retarded children. At the same time, minority groups decried the abundance of their children being classified as mentally retarded. Court cases ensued in which plaintiffs sought damages for being labeled mentally retarded. Because of these litigations and because of the increase in minority group action, the trend toward delabeling has become widespread.

Until recently, if children in special classes showed no advancement in a year's time, blame was attributed to student characteristics. This former practice implied that the responsibility rested with the child and that failure to learn could be explained in terms of the mental incapacity of the child. With accountability, however, the teacher becomes more responsible regardless of intellectual level of the students. Now failures to learn become teacher failures rather than student failures.

Early Identification and Intervention. MacMillan (April, 1973) discussed the headstart and other preschool programs for children from areas where there is high risk for developing learning problems or mental retardation. Kirk (1968) started intervention programs, through which the field of special education has discovered that many mild cases of retardation can be ameliorated if identified early enough. Heller (1968), using black, lower class children whose mothers had IQs of 80 or less, conducted a prevention rather than a remediation program and was able to achieve in his subjects stable IQs of 115 at age five, while control children had IQs of only 90.

The principle of early intervention can and has been extended to more severely handicapped children. For example, very young, deaf children have received communication training, and the results are quite positive. In the area of the severely retarded, less attention has been given to this approach. The Infant Stimulation Program efforts at The Ohio State University Nisonger Center have shown that training should be started as early as possible to enable later training to move into areas more directly related to academic and social subjects and vocational skills. "In the light of the evidence from operant conditioning research with mentally retarded subjects, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that ways may be developed for teaching these children skills previously thought beyond their capacities." Studies have shown that intelligence stabilizes at an early age, and found four year olds to be at a critical point in this process. Therefore, if a person wishes to influence intellectual development, intervention must occur early in a child's life.

Teacher Training. Bruinicks and Rynders (1972) contend that training programs for teachers have placed the emphasis on quantity rather than quality.

> There is little evidence that training programs in special education have systematically evaluated the extent to which their trainees have mastered prescribed and agreed-upon teaching skills. Instead, the stress in training programs has ostensibly been placed upon increasing the number of available teachers rather than on the quality of training, which leads to what Davis (1970) has characterized as a condition of 'demand-degradable teacher standards' in special education. The assumption that specially trained teachers are necessary to teach retarded children in special classes remains untested. Moreover, there is little evidence that special educators have established unique training programs for teachers, or that they have evaluated the extent to which certified special education teachers possess the skills considered necessary to teach retarded children. While general educators may also stand indicted on these issues, the presumed advantages of specially trained teachers educating retarded children as yet remains unproven (p. 45).

Paralleling Goldstein's comments, Davis states that all areas of learning other than language and computation skills are complementary to these skills in some way and are avenues for self-expression, depending upon how the teacher manages the activity. Therefore, the teacher must be trained to integrate learning experiences into the major categories of socio-occupational learning.

The idea of mainstreaming children, or placing special children in regular classes, involves problems concerning failure of children. The theory sounds fine, but many of these children were initially placed in special classes because of their failures in regular classes. If these children are to be placed in regular classes again, teachers must be trained to deal with the individual child at his level and with his specific learning capacities and disabilities. Teachers must also be trained in the causes and conditions of mental retardation and physical disability if they are to integrate the handicapped into the regular classroom in a way that will help, not hurt, the child. Otherwise, the practice of mainstreaming will be self-defeating.

Other people, in addition to teachers, need special training. A gap has always existed between the educational needs and the trained professionals prepared to meet these needs. One way of trying to meet personnel needs is to use paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals have been used in clerical and housekeeping duties, as teacher aides, and as instructional aides. Materials to be used in training paraprofessionals to understand and work with children are greatly needed.

There is also a need for materials to help train parents to work with handicapped children so that there can be some consistency between the child's treatment in the school and in the home environment. Some materials designed for these ventures could possibly improve a child's instructional milieu. These materials, however, need to be field-tested and refined so that children will not be torn between two methods of treatment.

Another means of helping or trying to help handicapped children is the use of cross-age tutoring. This practice has been employed because usually another student of a child's peer group is not perceived as a threat to the child as might be a teacher or another adult. This type of tutoring has not been researched thoroughly, although indications are that cross-age tutoring can be helpful, at least to some children.

With the practice of mainstreaming, teachers in regular classrooms will need more support personnel to help them develop instructional means to better serve those handicapped children who are placed in their classrooms. Although theoretical and limited, some ancillary programs have been available to teachers of special classes. Those services must be extended greatly. School nurses, speech therapists, teacher aides, and many other support personnel must soon be made available to teachers. These people must become integral to the system and pattern of instruction.

Buffmire (1973) believes that "stratisticians" can provide valuable support services. The stratistician would provide an effective interface between regular and special education by establishing a continuum of educational services for the handicapped child. The stratistician could be more than a collector of data and an identifier of problems faced by teachers and handicapped children in the classrooms. The stratistician might easily become an initiator in the development of resources to solve the problems. The stratistician collects data for the development of inservice and pre-service training packages. The prime target of the stratistician is the classroom teacher. Stratisticians should be trained in the development of communication and interacting skills, observation techniques, acceptance strategies, screening/diagnosis, planning, behavior modification, evaluation, and strategies of dealing with problem behaviors identified most often by teachers. Ideally, a stratistician would be located in each school building in which special children are being mainstreamed and would be the major resource for the teacher. The stratistician would train teachers in diagnostic/prescriptive skills.

Teachers should be provided also with adequate information concerning materials and techniques, so that selection of materials will be based on the demonstrated effectiveness of the product. The use of the diagnostic instruments for more than the classification of children should be incorporated into the total instructional experience. Quick access to materials to meet special needs as they arise would also be a valuable service.

The literature indicates that a communication system regarding instructional materials for the handicapped is also needed. Ensminger (1972) states that:

> While instructional materials are more readily available to the teacher today than they were a decade ago, the availability of materials for use with children still leaves much to be desired. In addition to availability, or where to locate materials, is the question of what materials to use for specific children. In other words, what rationale is to guide the teacher in selecting materials most appropriate for the learning characteristics of the child? It would seem that if a rationale for selection of materials were available, then the same rationale could be used for modifying materials, developing new materials, evaluating materials, and providing a diagnostic model as well (p. 149).

Drew and Martinson (1972) maintain:

> Means for transmitting information concerning education materials and/or techniques to the classroom have previously resembled a rather inefficient process of osmosis. A substantial portion of this process is left

> to chance occurrence. As a consequence, the existence of the much discussed "shotgun" philosophy of education is perpetuated.
>
> Teachers became aware of new techniques and materials primarily through word-of-mouth information or from commercial vendors. Because of this, the criteria involved in selection are seldom based on the demonstrated effectiveness of the product. Decisions are frequently made on the basis of the salesman's proficiency or what another teacher has heard concerning a given product. Additionally, many of the materials or techniques on the commercial market are not developed by qualified professionals. A valid evaluation of these products is often difficult for the practitioner to obtain (p. 164).

As a consequence, teachers are often forced to work in situations where information about materials is inadequate and where the lack of systematic, high-quality information tends to minimize the quality of instruction. Ensminger, Drew and Martinson all state that the SEIMC Network and regional resource centers are the only existing viable means of bridging the gap. Lazar states that a "...teacher should not have to order all of her desired materials until after she has surveyed the specific needs of her students" (p. 142).

Legal Needs. In addition to the actual school program and the development of materials, there are other environmental influences that can affect the pupil learning situation. One involves the awareness of and the legal responsiveness to the needs of the handicapped by state and federal legislators and others who help develop educational codes. Lazar states that "in most states and localities the codes are quite flexible. Administrators, therefore, must be made aware of problems faced by teachers and students in classrooms in which handicapped persons are being served. The administrators' awareness of and sympathy toward the problems can determine the effectiveness of a program" (No. 1, p. 141).

While not directly treating the issue of needs, the HACHE Newsletter (July, 1973), in its section on Comprehensive Education, states that nine bills passed in 1973 are related to the education of the handicapped. If the educational needs of the handicapped were already being met, these bills would not have been necessary.

Summary

The needs perceived by special educators enumerated below are drawn from the literature previously cited. The role of the NCEMMH in resolving some of the problems seems to be in planning, organizing, and implementing or facilitating the implementation of the following:

1. The development of a communication system between the teacher, local school district, state-regional resource and materials center, state department of special education, and the NCEMMH.

2. The field-testing of instructional materials developed by teachers, special education organizations, or commercial organizations.

3. The development of instructional materials for teachers in all areas of education for the handicapped.

4. The development of a training system for improving organizational and management skills of IRC coordinators.

5. The development of a system for identifying and reporting needs in the field of special education.

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